Transcendence as Creativity: Vocation in Andrei Tarkovsky

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> My films are not a personal expression but a prayer. When I make a film, it's like a holy day. As if I were lighting a candle in front of an icon, or placing a bouquet of flowers before it.[1]

Abstract

In this article, we venture to expose philosophical themes of the human being's spiritual search for meaning, personal individuation, and vocation in selected films of the Russian filmmaker, Andrei A. Tarkovsky. Focusing primarily on three of his films (*Andrei Rublev*, 1966, *Solaris*, 1972, and *Stalker*, 1979), 1) we sketch the interrelations between verticality, vocational call, transcendence, and creativity; 2) we explore the meaning of interpersonal relations and loving in relation to any genuine form of (self) transcendence; 3) we point out the problem of reductionist approaches to reality and underscore the irreducibility of a personal being; 4) we uncover the essential structures of vocations in relation to the primordial calling that we understand as loving; 5) we open up the question of the radical transformative force of affliction that may allow new spiritual depths of a personal life to unfold. All of these issues turn on the central mystery of the inter-connectedness and inter-permeating of the human and divine, of the created, the creating, and the uncreated.

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[1] Andrei Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, ed. John Gianvito (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 175.

Keywords

Tarkovsky – creativity – vocation – reductionism – transformation – mystery

Introduction

Andrei Arsenyevich Tarkovsky (1932 – 1986) was an influential Russian film director, writer, film editor, and theorist. Making only a handful of films, Tarkovsky's unique cinematic style and mastery greatly influenced world cinematography,[2] and was regarded by other masters of cinema as "the greatest of them all."[3]

Any attentive viewer of Tarkovsky's films would agree that these works are not only masterpieces of world cinematography and art, but also fundamental expositions of the human existential situation, imbued with profound philosophical and spiritual insights.

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[2] These films include *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), *Andrei Rublev* (1966), *Solaris* (1972), *Mirror* (1975), *Stalker* (1979), *Nostalghia* (1983) and *Sacrifice* (1986). The latter two films were made outside the Soviet Union, in Italy and Sweden, respectively. He died of lung cancer in Paris and is buried at the Russian Cemetery in Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois in France together with his wife, Larisa.

Given the wide variety of transcriptions from the Cyrillic to English, we adopt the convention of using the spelling for titles—where possible—from the films available in the Criterion Collection. We do this unless it is a direct quote from another source using a different spelling. We use the spelling of proper names, where available, from Andrei Tarkovsky: *Collected Screenplays*, trans., William Powell and Natasha Synessios (New York: Faber and Faber, 1999).

[3] For example, Ingmar Bergman, *The Magic Lantern: An Autobiography*, trans., Joan Tate (New York: Viking, 1988), 73.

Watching slowly flowing poetic scenes, as if we were following the pieces of a fresco, icon, or the unfolding of a poem, we are overwhelmed by the richness of the dimensions of sense that seem inexhaustible in depth and intensity. The mindful viewer knows that in spite of Tarkovsky's refusal to see his films as "symbolic," "allegoric," or "poetic," the iconic emergence of sense radiates through visual images and facial expressions, through the carefully set scenes with eloquent properties, referring to further meanings or to messages from his previous films, through particular story-events, and of course through silence, as much as words, voices, and sounds. Without trying to expose fully, to define, or to fix their meanings too strictly, one can always attempt to reflect on them, find their resonant meanings, and thus honor the author's creative undertaking.[4]

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[4] It would be more eloquent to speak of "parables," "ciphers" (in Karl Jaspers' sense), and literally, "icons," where an *image* is what it is itself *and* at the same time points beyond itself and bears unrestricted dimensions of what we will suggest below as "vertical" meanings. In interviews, Tarkovsky sometimes uses such notions as "symbol," "representation," and "metaphor" loosely; at other times, he attempts to clarify his view. What he refuses is the restriction of sense, as if to construct some exhaustible definition and fixed meaning. Tarkovsky says: "Symbolism is a difficult subject. I am an enemy of symbolism. Symbolism is too narrow a notion to me, because symbols are there to be decoded. But an artistic image cannot be decoded. It is an equivalent of the world we live in. The rain in *Solaris* is not a symbol, it is just rain that grows in significance for the hero at a certain point. It doesn't symbolize anything. It expresses something. That rain is an artistic image. The notion of the symbol is too confusing for me" (Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 122).

Tarkovsky's films are commonly referred to as "poetic," containing "poetic images," as "poetry in cinema," and Tarkovsky himself would affirm such qualifications [for example, Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on Cinema*, trans., Kitty Hunter-Blair, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 15-35]. For him, poetry in a broad sense means "an awareness of the world, a particular way of relating to reality" (Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*,

Our search for meaning as human persons, our search for self-realization, fulfillment and happiness, our exhaustive effort to apprehend or at least to glimpse our own identity within our life path are the dominant "tarkovskian" themes underlying all the particular film settings and concrete life stories of the film characters. The artist's quest for the meaning of creativity in the world full of suffering, ignorance, and destruction embraces the more universal question about the meaningfulness of any human effort, and of any relational and social involvement of an individual.

Leaving aside the psychological and psychoanalytic aspects, which can be evaluated by others with expertise in those areas, our concern here is philosophical. Looking closely at Tarkovsky's exposition of the *experience* of a human being in the world, we attempt to uncover the density and depth of Tarkovsky's artistic visions embodied in his films. For the purpose of this brief study, we do this with special regard primarily to three of them, while keeping in mind, and with occasional reference to, other films that make up the whole body

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21). Poetry is much closer to human reality than any coherent logic and strict rational approach. Tarkovsky sums up: "We can express ourselves toward the world that exists in a poetic way or a purely descriptive manner. Personally, I prefer to express myself in a metaphoric way. I insist on saying metaphoric and not symbolic. The symbol intrinsically comprises a specific meaning, an intellectual formula, while the metaphor is the image itself. It's an image that possesses the same characteristics as the world it represents. Contrary to the symbol, its meaning is undefined. We aren't able to speak about a world that is truly boundless utilizing means which themselves are definite and restricted. We can analyze a formula, that is to say, a symbol, but a metaphor is an entity unto itself, a monomial. If one tries to describe it, immediately it falls to pieces" (Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 86; see, too, 136–37).

of his work. The main films for our exposition are *Andrei Rublev* (1966), *Solaris* (1972), and *Stalker* (1979).[5]

We examine these films in five interrelated sections. 1) We inquire into the meaning of creativity in its directedness to (self) transcendence and verticality, and examine the interrelations between verticality, vocational call to transcendence, and creativity. We do this in relation to all three films. 2) Here, we explore the different forms of transcendence and the meaning of interpersonal relations and loving that accompany any genuine form of (self) transcendence. Specifically, we examine transcendence and the meaning of community, primarily with *Andrei Rublev*. 3) In this section, we point out the problem of any kind of

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[5] His other works—the diploma film, *The Steamroller and the Violin*, the early *Ivan´s Childhood*, his mature film *Nostalghia* or the last one, *Sacrifice*—resonate well with our features and topics; however, they are too complex to integrate them within these short reflections. *Mirror* (1975) is the film that bears a strong autobiographical timbre, and too has many themes similar to the others we treat. All of his films, though, share the same "handwriting" regarding style and messages conveyed through the strongly affective poetic images; they all present the serious call of the author: "The more there is evil in the world, the more we have reasons to create beauty" (Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 165).

He believes that art exists not for public or commercial entertainment (which would be an artist's pandering); rather, the aim of art (and of all of his films) is to point to the meaning of one's own existence and to make a spiritual impact, which has religious, ethical, aesthetic, and ecological implications. "For there is no deeper, more mysterious, and more critical mystery than the mystery of our existence. And if everyone … or many, will think in this fashion, then life will change" (Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 137). For him, the language and the impact of art (the *beautiful*) is emotional, cathartic, shaping the spiritual structure of a "soul" (Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 43). It should always influence an ethical upheaval of the human being. It conveys the truth about the human being and a world as "a hieroglyphic of absolute truth" (Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 37).

reductionist approach to reality, and we underscore the irreducibility of a personal being in terms of individuation and personal identity. We do this primarily with regard to the film, *Solaris*. In the next section (4), we explore the meaning of vocation through exemplars and those who become distracted from their ways. For this, we focus on *Stalker*. 5) Finally, we open the question of the radically transformative force of affliction that can open new spiritual depths of a personal life as essentially united with divine mystery.

In the following sections, we examine the main philosophical issues and religious or metaphysical visions in these films. Rather than give a complete summary of the films under consideration here, we only briefly sketch the main content of the film-narratives. We thematically select certain moments of the films, and through them we expose the main philosophical ideas and orientation of our reflections.

1. Verticality in Balloons, Horses, and Colors

Andrei Rublev: *The Passion According to Andrei* (1966) loosely portrays the life of the 15th-century Russian iconographer, Andrei Rublev. Historically, Andrei Rublev is considered to be the greatest medieval Russian painter of Orthodox icons and frescoes. He was born around 1360 CE, and died around 1430 CE in the Andronikov Monastery. But in reality, we know very little about his life – Tarkovsky felt free to "create him" according to a few historical facts and from his art itself.

Rublev's paintings are characteristic of serenity and silent calmness. His most famous work is the icon of the Trinity (c. 1410) where the three angelic figures (originally from the story of "Abraham's Hospitality," Bereshit/Genesis 18) leads symbolically to the Christian mystery of Trinitarian Divine Life. The Son (having pieces of red clothes as a sign of suffering) and the Father are looking gently, lovingly at each other; the Holy Spirit as a personification of relational, life-giving, creative divine Loving itself (green pieces on his garments) is pointing toward creation. There is a hypothesis, based on recent research and

analyses, that on the original icon, there was a small mirror glued right within the communion of divine Life. One could see one's own face as an essential part of the Mystery!

Through Tarkovsky's story of Andrei Rublev's life and "passion," Tarkovsky depicts the uneasy social conditions of medieval Russia characterized by fighting "paganism," fights between rival princes, and violent Tatar raids. As a brief synopsis: The film is divided into eight chapters, with both a "Prologue" and an "Epilogue." The film presents Andrei as an authentic spiritual seeker and a creative spirit who gives his monastic and artistic life to the service of God and others. He holds on to the firm trust in the essential goodness of human beings and the possibility of their enhancement (through education, art, and caring). His basic trust in God and meaningfulness of humanity is tried when he survives and witnesses the massacre and overall devastation of the city, Vladimir, during a Tatar raid. Overwhelming cruelty and violence that he experienced rendered him silent for years (literally and artistically), until he meets with the struggling creative spirit dwelling in a teenage orphan, Boriska, the bell-maker. Hearing the call of the bell, personified, too, in the creative energies of the bell-maker, he ends his silence and starts to paint again. He does this with hope and goodness for others, understanding creation and beauty as part of the divine task given to him, as a gift that cannot be wasted.

The "Prologue" of *Andrei Rublev* is expressive of the vertical movement of transcendence. By vertical movement or "verticality," we mean that lived-orientation, that religious, moral, or aesthetic "updraft," antithetic to the movement of falling. It expresses the unpredictable, the dangerous, the spontaneous, and the undomesticable which erupts in the "world." In this way, another is esteemed "on high," an individual is "upright," a mood is "elated." Verticality is de-limiting, not just by going beyond pre-established limits; it liberates being for what it *is*, fully, while revealing, manifesting, disclosing, etc., more. The

vertical takes us beyond ourselves, and is irreducible to static, authoritarian hierarchies, as it is to any kind of relativism.[6]

In this opening scene of *Andrei Rublev*, we have an individual, Yefim (but in some sense exemplary of all the main characters) trying to overcome the basic restrictions of the human condition by constructing a balloon *to fly*. Through Yefim, we can indeed recognize ourselves tenaciously struggling for some kind of upward transcendence and a generative life-meaning.

After surmounting hurdles, and chased by a furious ignorant crowd, the hot-air balloon (made of materials roughly sewn together) finally lifts up from the old church tower – which is the place from where the bells call the faithful ones to linger in sacred attention. For a short while, the flight brings its creator relief and exaltation: the higher perspective, a new sense of freedom, escaping herd mentality, and the ever-present burdens of the human lot. However, the scene ends up with the tragic crash of the flight. Yefim, apparently fallen to his death, is accompanied with shots of an unbridled and unsaddled horse rolling on its back, back and forth, as the hot-air balloon crashes.

It is significant that the horse does not remain motionless and vanquished; the noble animal rises from the ground and goes on its way. The human paths of creativity, desire for life, and all of its efforts for enhancement are ceaseless. The horse (the image so often used by Tarkovsky) points to that dimension of life and freedom that has always been for the human being as alluring and risky as the siren's lures for Odysseus. The human person is desire, creativity, and the restless effort to transcend. Although the "Prologue" seems to have

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[6] For the notion of verticality, see Anthony J. Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism: The Verticality of Religious Experience* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), esp., the "Introduction." See, too, chapter 8. For the relation between verticality and related concept of "de-limitation," see Jana Trajtelová, "On Verticality and De-Limitation," in *The Yearbook on History and Interpretation of Phenomenology 2014: Normativity & Typification* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014), 131-59.

no direct connection with the following storyline of the film, it can easily stand as a guide to all of Tarkovsky's films. When asked about the idea of the "Prologue" with the flying man, Tarkovsky replied: "It was for us a symbol of daring, in the sense that creation requires from man the complete offering of his being."[7]

Yefim represents the creative spirit, the courageous outstanding individual, the inventor, the rebelling genius standing alone against ignorance, and gravity, perhaps even the "voice" of technical creativity; it might even be expressive of the efforts of the filmmaker himself. The church tower, the ropes used for the takeoff, the hot-air balloon pointing vertically to the open sky—all of these refer to the inherent religious significance of the liberating creative act. These events take place surrounded by chaos and panic as the mob heads for him. Is this a judgment by the people for what is perceived as blasphemy? In any case, his deed is threatening; it goes beyond the usual understanding of reality, and people are afraid of this strange contraption that looks so unnatural. "I'm flying!" Yefim shouts, and people stare in awe. He has no way of navigating or exerting control over the situation—our relation with Mystery; moreover, we presume that this is the first attempt to fly in such a manner, expressing the fact that every creative effort is as if it were the first time.

On the one hand, flying for the human being is fully "unnatural"; yet genuine creative expression, which is here expressed as flying, is fully *essential* to who we are as human *persons*. For human beings as a mere species in a taken-for-granted, ready-made sense, it is indeed unnatural; for human *persons*, it can become a unique way of self-transcendence, essentially vertical. In this respect, the vertical is un-natural, but essential: What has really been transcended here is the socio-historical and psychological conditioning of humankind. *Transcendence is the genuine telos of creativity*, *always in the orientation of verticality*.

While *Andrei Rublev* was shot in black and white (including the "Prologue"), the "Epilogue" virtually explodes in color, and is accompanied by the majestic music from Vyacheslav Ovchinnikov. The shift to this refulgent splendor of color takes place right after

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[7] Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 26.

the longer black and white, silent view that is trained on ashes. An allusion to the legendary Phoenix or to the Resurrection is easy to imagine. We are just shown the "pieta" image of Andrei Rublev holding and comforting the broken *and* redeemed boy, Boriska, who just underwent his personal "crucifixion." As the "pieta" image finishes, with the shot on the ashes, there is an amazing change of perspective: astonishing colors, music, and beauty! As in the case of the "Prologue," such an "Epilogue" may at first seem that the final shots remain outside of the main storyline of the film. But only here does the story about the work of the extraordinary artist find its full meaning: We witness the details of Andrei Rublev's paintings, and this artistic presentation centers on the detailed presentation of Rublev's famous *Trinity* as the very core of the mystery of which human beings are a tiny but significant part. One can notice tight connections between the images of the real Rublev's paintings and the life experiences of the characters in the film (like Doom's Day and the Tatar's raid with the subsequent massacre).

The colorful poetic image of horses makes up very last part of this film. The final scene evokes the renewed, redeemed (perhaps even "eschatological") world, the victory of life and spirit in all creation. The noble white animals are pasturing on the grassy pieces of land by water. Rain falls. Life flourishes. The purity of nature works as a perfect mirror of the incarnated divine life.[8]

The author's own life experiences now live in his art, in bright colors, within *and* beyond history; they became a sacred picture full of meaning. His own life experience, experiences of all humankind, are suddenly presented from the perspective of the Infinite, as already redeemed, beyond all of its beauties and cruelties, beyond happiness and unhappiness, beyond any endeavor and resignation, even beyond faith. The icon of the *Trinity*

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[8] "I would like to add this: the film ends with the image of the horses in the rain. In this manner, we wanted to come back to the symbol of life, because for me the horse symbolizes life... By returning to the image of the horses in the last shots, we wanted to highlight that the source of all of Roublev's art is life itself" (Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 25).

is the most profound and central Christian pointer to the un-manifested meaningfulness of existence, expressive of a mysterious divine unity as an eternal creative loving community. It speaks volumes without a word, with radiating peace, about the ultimate goodness of the created and the uncreated.

Solaris (1972) is an artistic film adaptation of the novel, *Solaris*, penned by the Polish science-fiction writer, Stanisław Lem.[9] However, for Tarkovsky, his film is not at all in the genre of science-fiction (the same holds for *Stalker*). It is a deep metaphor of the human being's most intimate life. The plot is simple: The psychologist, Chris Kelvin, travels to a space station that explores the cosmic oceanic substance called Solaris. It seems that Solaris's effects on the crew's minds lead them into despair, fear, and even suicide. Strange phenomena appear to each of them: so-called "visitors." They can be interpreted as substantializations or embodiments of their mental contents, more concretely, of their moral conscience. Chris meets his dead wife and undergoes a deep personal crisis that leads him to transformation. In the end, he comes back home to meet with his father. However, it seems that the father's house is only a small *conscious* "island" surrounded by the unbounded ocean of Solaris.

For Tarkovsky, *Solaris* (and, as we will see, *Stalker*), is a journey into our intimate world and relationships with others. Tarkovsky expressed it in this way: "From running about on the surface of the planet, we don't learn much. Nor do I believe that one travels in order to return. Man can never return to his point of departure, because he himself, in the meantime, changes. And, of course, you can't escape from yourself; what you are, you carry with you … Wherever you get to, you are still seeking your own soul."[10]

The opening of *Solaris* is situated within the innocent beauty of nature with long shots on plants and water. The serenity of the lake, peaceful, flowing movements of grass, the

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[9] Stanisław Lem's science fiction novel *Solaris* was first published in Warsaw in 1961.

[10] It is in fact a manner of expression very similar to C. G. Jung. See Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 93.

firmness of trees, nourishing rainfall, and a benevolent unity with the elements surround and permeate the father's house. (When Chris comes back home from his adventurous journey in the last scene, there is falling water and smoke *inside* the house, expressing that the same Life, the same Spirit, flows outside and inside.)

Perhaps as an allusion to motifs in *Andrei Rublev* or as a reappropriation of key themes, we see a white balloon floating over the lake "pointing" vertically, and pictures of hot-air balloons on the wall inside of the house. A horse runs freely as if an integral part of this ideal home: Perhaps a lost paradise, a true *home* referring to mystical wholeness and genuine comfort, or as we will suggest later, the father's house which is to be left and re-found by the prodigal son—these biblical allusions are too obvious to be overlooked.

The main protagonist, Chris Kelvin, bids farewell to the place where he grew up, to his father, and to his memories and to his past. He is getting ready for an adventurous journey to another planet, to the mysterious substance of Solaris, to do, let's say, "scientific research." Of course, our film is very far from science-fiction movies, and Kelvin's mission has nothing to do with the so-called scientific mission. His adventure bears a vertical meaning: flying up in the spacecraft toward the risky and unexplored; it is a small leap of an individual and of humankind toward genuine transcendence. The story ends with the deep personal transformation of the main protagonist who was unaffected by so-called scientific findings or explanations; rather, he left them behind for the sake of the spiritual and the interpersonal dimension of the human person. What Rembrandt expressed in painting as his vision of the *Prodigal son*, Tarkovsky expressed with the same geniality in the powerful poetic scene of the son's return to father's house toward the end of the film. The similarities between the two are not coincidental. (In fact, Tarkovsky loved Rembrandt).

As we suggested above, entering or losing the vertical dimension of reality is also expressed visually by transitioning between black and white shots, and color ones. In this case, the shifts into color touch viewers *beyond* the realm of words and storylines. One suddenly perceives the dimension of splendor that was missing until now and without

realizing it before this time.[11] Our everyday limited, partial approaches to reality (including the scientific ones) are suddenly confronted with surprising existential fullness, intensity, and multidimensionality. There are several color changes in *Solaris* as well. There is a loss of color as we are shown the long car route to civilization, traveling from the peaceful natural place where Chris's home is situated, to a big city made of concrete and metal.[12] This transition is accompanied by electronic music, rather disturbing disharmonic technical sounds, as if they should represent the civilization's rubbish occupying human minds throughout generations. Is this an allusion to a lost paradise? The contrast between nature as life bursting-forth and emptied technical civilization becomes an important artistic device in Tarkovsky's work.

Stalker (1979) is a story of three men entering an enigmatic place called "the Zone." The journey in the Zone is portrayed as an adventure of the spiritual search of oneself and the meaning of life. It is based on Boris and Arkady Strugatsky's science-fiction novel, *Roadside Picnic*. Life flourishes in special ways and intensity in the "Zone," in the mysterious, sacred place that resists the subjugation of the human, and evades human comprehension (like the substance of Solaris in *Solaris*). Here the "Stalker" is both a seeker and spiritual guide, leading others, in this case, a writer and a professor/scientist, who have booked passage through an unknown, uncharted, and unstable area to an enigmatic place—ostensibly to a room in which desires are fulfilled.

The path—the process of transcendence—is never the same for each visit or for each visitor. Each time, the Stalker has to be creative in finding his way. He works within a basic orientation, but new obstacles appear where apparently none were before; familiar passages are now either unfamiliar or completely transformed. Wavy images of solid ground suggest the tenuous and open quality of the Zone and this process of transcending. We see the Stalker have to invent ways to move forward (which might seem to be a retreat), all the while urging

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[11] In everyday life one does not consciously notice colors – as Tarkovsky points out.

[12] We know that this long "voyage toward civilization" was shot in the city of Tokyo.

his co-travelers not only to be extremely attentive to the route, but humble in following the route. Existence as transcendence is like a step taken in the fog; we do not know where, if anywhere it will lead.[13] The Zone is very complicated and full of traps, because "everything is in motion," dynamic. As in the spiritual life, everything is in process, so that we cannot simply wait or go back. Even the Stalker, as guide, cannot master the Zone. (Suddenly, the Professor/Scientist shows up in a new place with his knapsack, eating.) One must remain humble, not taking himself or herself too seriously because ultimately it depends upon the Zone.

The transitions into color seem even more significant here for expressing the presence of the vertical dimension. The Zone breathes into colors. As the three restless seekers are entering the Zone, black and white scenes of a bleak and destroyed environment, including a factory and human dwellings, break into colorful images of wilderness, indestructible and uncontrollable nature. The manifested nature with its unbounded elements and vivacity like an icon, is itself a pointer to the "un-manifested." This scene of transition is also characteristic of the long detailed shots on human ears (similar to particular scenes in *Solaris*), when precisely an attentive listening or a right way of hearing is required for reconnecting with the all-embracing mystery of life and of one's own existence. Here it is a matter of *listening beyond words and forms*.

We could continue recounting similar moments in these and other films by Tarkovsky, and we would find many images that speak to *verticality, self-transcendence*, and *creativity* as mutually interdependent, and even identified with one another. Each genuine creative movement is always already vertical, always already transcendence, and already takes one *beyond* himself or herself. Each vertical movement is always already creative and as such transcending. Basic human existential movements such as a desire to transcend, a human search for the meaning of life and meaningful values, a seeking for one's own identity

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[13] To recall the movement of transcendence and expression articulated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

and a life task, a surprising emergence of creativity, all these most "natural" and "un-natural" human existential upheavals already signify the presence of the spiritual dimension in human life, a dimension without which an individual cannot be called a *human person*. That is why for Tarkovsky, the core task of art is "resurrecting spirituality."[14]

2. Ways of Transcendence and the Meaning of Community: *Andrei Rublev*

In an interview from November 1983, Andrei Tarkovsky spoke the following words, words that resound in all his life and work: "I see the only meaning of human existence in the effort to overcome yourself spiritually, to become different from what you are at birth, in growing. If in that span, between the poles of birth and death, we manage to achieve this – even if it is hard and the advance is small – we will have served humanity."[15] His universal message imposing an infinite task on humankind finds its unique creative expression in each human individual. Creative artistic activity is only one way among many others – even though we may intuitively find the artistic vocation somehow exemplary and privileged.[16]

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[14] "With the word 'spirituality' I first of all have in mind a person's interest in what has been called the meaning of life. This is the first step, at least. People who ask themselves this question can no longer sink below this level. They will develop and move onward... The people who do not ask themselves these questions or have not yet asked them are individuals without spirituality. In other words, they exist on the level of animals, felines – animals don't ask themselves such questions.

I won't deny that I have seen very happy cats" (Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 145).

[15] Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 93.

[16] This may be so, given the more direct relation of an artist with the process of creation in form of co-creation (as Bergman also suggests in his films). There is an unbearable irresistibility of *the* call to create experienced by an artist, comparable to a call of the biblical prophet – hence closer to vocation in the religious sense of the word. Late Tarkovsky speaks

We could see many ways in which Tarkovsky's characters are trying to transcend themselves, joining the vertical creative movement in some kind of co-creation and thus re-connecting the world with the unifying divine Source. *Andrei Rublev* provides a nice variety of transcending human efforts, starting with Yefim as representing scientific/technical creativity, continuing with traditional religious vocations (devotion to prayer, meditation, consecrated life), and artistic transcendence (painters, icon-writers, craftsmen), to say nothing of a folk jester using humor and sarcasm to make the hardships of life lighter for others and for himself; they include as well an erotic or orgiastic way of self-transcendence searching the natural sense of unity and self-forgetfulness.[17]

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more explicitly about creativity: "As long as man shall exist, there will be an instinctive tendency for creation. As long as man feels like a man, he will try to create something. Therein lies the link with his Creator. What is creation? What is the use of art? The answer to this question resides in a formula: 'art is a prayer.' That says it all. Through art, man expresses his hope… I repeat, art is a form of prayer. Man lives by his prayer alone" (Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 166).

[17] With the nightingales that accompany a scene in "Spring" in *Andrei Rublev*, we have the invocation of an untroubled human existence, filled with erotic beauty. Andrei seems curious and encounters the pagan fertility rites, nudity, having abandoned the convention of clothing, etc. Thus, on the one hand, we see the monks who force the people to accept faith, and on the other, carefree sensuality. Love is separated into "brotherly love" and "bestiality." Then, the question is posed by the woman: "Isn't all love the same?" Andrei remains silent. (Compare this with the end of Bergman's *Through a Glass Darkly*, 1961). [Dialogue between father and son]: David: "… love exists as something real in the world of men." Minus: "Of course, it's a special sort of love you're referring to." David: *Every* sort of love, Minus! The highest and the lowest, the poorest and the richest, the most ricidulous and themost sublime. The obsessive and the banal. All sorts of love.")

We could also highlight the perverted approaches to transcendence and a personal self-realization, e.g., pride and self-gratification at the expense of others (Kirill), various forms of violence and abuses of power (like in case of the rival princes – the brothers). The latter necessarily lead to existential isolation and degeneration, because these prevent an individual from genuine transcendence toward his or her genuine vocational dimension. Each of the ways, one after another, could themselves become a rich source for our analyses.

However, we would like to take a little different approach. We outline the relation between an individual's search for meaning, personal identity, and self-realization, and the wider communal, collective appropriation of meaning and will for communal enhancement; moreover, the latter includes the relation of an individual to the whole of the world in a metaphysical sense. The significance of these interrelations also lies in their ability to reveal more about the *meaning of an individual vocation as co-creation*. The interdependence of an individual, community, and the world has an essential and metaphysical significance in Tarkovsky's world. This world is one of faith, of creation yearning for a real loving relational unity, the world soaked by the living presence of its creative divine source, the mysterious place of ongoing creation.

What is the meaning of "vocation as co-creation" and why should notions like "life-meaning," "identity," "transcendence," or "creativity" be linked together? Are these not merely "leftovers" of our childhood religious education? Do they have an experiential basis? It is precisely such an experience we are trying to approach here. It is enough to suggest, roughly, that all are expressive of the personal, spiritual, and vocational dimensions of the human person and of loving in the broadest sense; and Tarkovsky portrays the truth of these landmarks in his artistic way throughout all his films.

Thus, every truly *trans-personal and interpersonal mode of attention*, or any *other-than-myself directedness* is already a basic human mode of transcendence. Various specific forms of the personal affirmation of meaning, or more deeply, vocational meaning (being an artist, being a parent, being a lover), are unique personal expressions of *transcending* and

creative intentionality. Real, life-enhancing value is always transcendent, looked up to (vertical), followed, desirable, inciting further creative movements. The self-transcending movement toward value is therefore essentially *constitutive of the human person as relational* (trans-subjective and inter-subjective). Genuine transcendence always aims *beyond* the realm of mere *individual self-concern*, and *beyond* his or her *socio-historical, biological, and psychological conditionings.* New quality can emerge, a new creation: A deep loving relationship is born and alive once a person transcends toward the uniqueness of the other; new ideas, inventions, or works of art emerge to uplift humankind; new levels of spiritual depth are approached.

This is also why a true transcending activity, deed, or event may seem like a real threat or danger for a prejudiced mind, and will most commonly be met with and incite resistance (like the frightened mob trying to thwart Yefim's flight). Merely remaining with psychological and cultural conditioning (which implies being enchained by routine or habitual patterns of thought and action, and which refers to the vicious circle of any addiction), would mean producing mere variations of the *same*, with no true movement, only repetitions and stagnancy. The transcending act always aims at *otherness*. Thus the genuine transcending movement is always *creative* and expressive of (profoundly personal) spiritual freedom. Only such a freedom can experience an incessant freshness of bursting life permeated by spirit: spirit which is life, life nourishing all created being.

The author of the famous "Trinity," Andrei Rublev, is presented by Tarkovsky as a great observer. We see him among people, within living nature, right inside of events, witnessing beauties and cruelties of the world. Tarkovsky was able to convey to a viewer an amazing sense of silent humility and unceasing contemplation surrounding Andrei's presence. Many scenes show him as silently watching and carefully absorbing everything that meets him and that he encounters. In his openness, he is subtly attentive to each situation, learning from it, approaching it with gentleness, without pre-judgments, resistance, or self-

gratification through what he observes. This is a superb example of transcending intentionality.

By contrast, Kirill, Andrei's fellow brother, is a monk who is self-absorbed in judgments and self-righteousness, and strikingly insensitive toward the joys or pains of others. Kirill's paintings have no spiritual resonance, no vertical efficacy. He suffers from jealousy and even hatred of Andrei. He seeks his own self-aggrandizement and self-gratification in "art." For Tarkovsky, the truly creative act is already taking its author *beyond* himself or herself and his or her own authorship, because it comes from another. He considers it to be a gift that brings with it a profound responsibility and service to others.[18] Acknowledging a gift as gift, we are already in transcendent perspective and a transcending orientation, bound with Transcendence. After all, any creative activity bears such transcending and transcendent qualities. The intentional focus is fully outside of oneself in and through the creative idea or deed. Accordingly, self-concern is naturally reduced through the subject's absorption in artistic activity and its object. Normally, the sense of self-realization comes as a side effect of creation, but it is never a goal in and of itself.

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[18] "Humans have been created in the likeness of God, and if we carry within ourselves an artistic seed – every person inherently carries it within them – then we should not squander our talent, for we do not have the right to consider it our own property" (Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 148).

Tarkovsky, surprisingly, uses Kirill to address Andrei toward the end of the film (Kirill who, after all, it seems does come back to "Himself" and repent): "Don't burden your soul, for it is an awful sin to deny the divine spark." In *Sculpting and Time* Tarkovsky writes: "The artist is always a servant, and is perpetually trying to pay for the gift that has been given to him as if by a miracle. Modern man, however, does not want to make any sacrifice, even though true affirmation of self can only be expressed in sacrifice. We are gradually forgetting about this, and at the same time, inevitably, losing all sense of our human calling…." (Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 38; cf. 43).

The story reveals probably the greatest paradox of the "autonomous" existence of a human being: the true self-realization of the human person lies in his or her transcending toward the meaning or the values that contributes to a good greater than that of the isolated individual. The loving-community stands at the core of the divine mystery.

From this perspective, let us look more closely at the meaning of a personal community. We can notice parallels between the "Prologue" in *Andrei Rublev* and the later scenes of the bell-making. In both scenes, we have long images of vertically stretched ropes (supporting the balloon before the flight, supporting the bell before it is tested). Notice that the bell is usually a part of a church tower removed from, but calling the people (like the bell-tower from which Yefim takes off in the "Prologue"). Here, however, the bell-making creative process unites a community in the earth and clay. There is also a risk of losing one's life in the process of making this bell: not just from the sheer mass of the object, not simply from the enormous effort invested in constructing such a bell—the process of which no one is quite sure—but also because of possible failure. Tarkovsky tries to communicate the importance of the relation between a creative individual and a community, as well as the human process of transcendence, which is genuinely vertical.

There is a more obvious issue of the creative individual and community in the figure of Andrei Rublev. Because of the tragedies and utter destruction he witnesses, Andrei Rublev experiences the futility of all creation, all "brotherhood," and any form of direct communication and hence communion with others. By contrast, Andrei imposes on himself a vow of silence, and in this way removes himself from communion/community *and correlatively* renounces painting/creating—even though he was renowned as the most gifted icon painter. This is different from Kirill's severing himself from his community, his radical loss of faith expressed by beating his dog (the faithful one, "fido") to death, censoring humor, laughter, music (he turns in the jester), and wandering off alone—all expressive of his egoism and pride.

This situation in intertwined with Andrei's encounter of the young bell-maker. Boriska

is the son of a bell-maker who, to save himself, swears (falsely we learn) that the secret of bell-making was passed down to him by his father. In contrast to an expert who renounces creation for reasons of spirit, a novice out of sheer determination and what seems at first as a will to survive vitally, strives *to create*—despite all odds, despite the enormity of the undertaking. Further, in spite of the harsh temperament and stubbornness of this boy (even cruelty as a way of "relief"), he is forced to cooperate with a whole community. The well-being and lives of many are in his hands (since they depend on a successful completion of a bell for the prince).

Let's compare this with what Tarkovsky has touched upon in the "Prologue." Yefim flies alone; as an isolated genius he stands against the ignorant and terrified crowds. The flight should bring a temporary relief and satisfaction—to him alone in the first place. There are about dozen helpers, perhaps hired by him to help him with accomplishing his experiment, perhaps "believers." But in the hot-air balloon scene, we see how the ropes are cut off: the vertical threads joining the earth with heavens are rashly disconnected in order to transcend, to fly. Yefim's solitary approach to transcend initiates from "above," from the highest point of the church tower, after he cut off all the connections with the earthly affairs as our basis and origin. In Boriska's case, the whole community joins together to help carry the project forth; they pull the ropes so that their creation (the bell) can serve its communal function. Although Boriska initiates the activity with boldness and sense of purpose, Boriska and his group carry out their creative activity from "down below," as it were, toward "on high."

First we see a huge hole dug deeply in the ground where the bell-creation begins. We see a lot of dust, a long search for just the right clay; we witness the process of working with clay, shots of the ground, hard work, and sweat. One cannot but think of the humble beginnings from which human beings were created and lifted-up (biblically) and where they belong. And one cannot but think of the meaning of *humility*, too (the English word derived from Latin *humilis* "lowly, humble," literally "on the ground," from *humus* "earth"). It is

precisely this dust and this clay, which is also the incomprehensible stardust of the infinite universe and the blessed clay of the biblical creation story. We have the earth (clay); we have fire to heat the clay; we have air (the bellows), we have water at the end (rain). It is a very elemental process. And we have spirit, in the creative process, in the formation of something, something sounding, the bell. It is a bell that *calls* the faithful to break with profane activities and to be mindful of the sacred; it is the bell that calls us to Ourselves and to who we are most deeply. For being *human*, it is humility and the earth ground that are the irreplaceable bases for his or her efforts to transcend. But as human *persons*, with these humble beginnings, we can overcome the restrictions of the finite being and fly toward the un-manifested and Infinite.

Bells not only ring victoriously at Easter Sunday after the three days of an empty silence, sounding the Trinity. The Bell symbolizes the voice of God, which also awakens Andrei's own faith, and renews his faith in the meaningfulness of individual and communal undertakings. It breaks Andrei's self-imposed, isolating vow of silence. It is Andrei's own "Kol Nidre" that breaks the past vows in order to renew a relationship with God and the community. It awakens deep compassion and loving, which were buried under the imprints of cruelties and violence. The bell invites him to openness; it calls him to accept the finite conditions as well as to accept his own gift and responsibility for the gift before others, acknowledging and participating in the mystery of creation. Andrei reaffirms and surrenders to his vocation as an icon painter as reaffirming and surrendering to his unique contribution of co-creation. Whereas prior to this transformation, Andrei fearfully admitted that he could only see the world with his master's eyes, ears, and heart; yet he only truly sees *what* Danil sees, etc., when he no longer imitates what Danil sees, etc., it, but when he is called to himself, seeing, hearing, feeling in his unique *manner* according to his re-affirmation and surrender. (This is a related theme of individuation that we find in the case of Hari vis-à-vis Chris in *Solaris*).

While considering the question of individual vocation we speak about "being an

artist" or "being a lover" instead of simply "doing art" or mere "making love to" in order to emphasize that our question of individual (and communal) meaning and vocation here is not simply a question of *what* one *does*, but *how* one uniquely *is*. We could say that vocation and meaning are not matters simply of doing (as mere actions and social roles), but of *being* or *be-ing*—in a more dynamic metaphysical or spiritual sense. For example, be-ing a painter refers to a peculiar and integrated *way of being* a unique person in and through which he or she contributes, in a very unique and irreplaceable way, to the realm of meaningful values of the whole community and for its goodness and enhancement.[19]

Let us recall that for the mystics, such vocational uniqueness of an individual emerges

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[19] In the "docu-diary" film, *Voyage in Time* (1983), the Italian screenwriter and collaborator on *Nostalghia*, Tonino Guerra, reads a question to Tarkovsky: "If you had to talk to some young directors, what would your recommendations be?"

Tarkovsky reflects: "Nowadays everybody makes movies, everybody things they can make movies, you see? Anyone that is not too lazy … It's not hard to learn how to glue the film, how to work a camera … But the advice I can give to beginners is not to separate their work, their movie, their film from the life they live. Not to make a difference between the movie and their own life. Because … a director is like any other artist: a painter, a poet, a musician … And since it is required from him to contribute his own self, it is strange to see directors that take their work as a special position, given to them by destiny, and simply exploit their profession. That is, they live in one way, but make movies about something else. And I'd like to tell directors, especially young ones, that they should be morally responsible for what they do while making their films. Do you understand? It is the most important of all. Secondly, they should be prepared for the thought that cinema is a very difficult and serious art. It requires sacrificing of yourself. You should belong to it, it shouldn't' belong to you. Cinema uses your life, not vice versa. Therefore I think that this is the most important … You should sacrifice yourself to the art. That is what I've been thinking lately about my profession."

out of the deepest spiritual core of the person—this is the source of genuine creativity, and is always already embodied in some activity and expressed in concrete deeds, works, or service. Being a painter then does not point to doing or having a profession, say, but toward a peculiar, personally unique kind of relating to and expressing reality—in a way that no one else does and can express; but this also means a unique revelation of the Divine, hence a unique co-creation. We can follow this in the case of Andrei Rublev. His artistic genius emerges right out of his inner innocent quality of being and aims toward others; is not merely a result of his skills or efforts—quite the opposite of self-gratification, self-aggrandizement, and the fame-seeking motivations of Kirill. Andrei seems to go along with the deeper genuine creative movement and his work, and life becomes a real co-creation.

3. Personal Identity and a Critique of Reductionism: *Solaris*

As artist, Tarkovsky appeals to the viewer to perceive always *more* of human reality, to perceive it with greater fullness, communicating the subtleties of an intimate spiritual life of the person. For him, every true art does this. In multilayered ways, using all our senses, evoking and provoking our deepest intuitions, art has the ability to trigger invisible and ineffable resonances within us and thus awaken and uplift the human spirit. Tarkovsky believes that art exists precisely for keeping human spirituality alive, how it "can reach to the depths of the human soul and leave man defenseless against good."[20] The biggest sin of art is to sell itself out for commercial enterprise, as mere "entertainment" or exhibitionism. The explicit critique of reductionism in his films aims at emphasizing the *more* about being a human person and the *more* about being itself.

Viktor Emil Frankl (1905-1997), a well-known Austrian existential psychiatrist who survived the Holocaust, considers reductionist views on the human being as variants of nihilism, ways in which a modern human being somehow perversely delights, though being

[20] Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 69.

existentially deprived. Frankl distinguished the three main types of reductionism: physiologism as a reduction of a human being to physical or material reality, sociologism as a reduction to social determinants, and psychologism as a reduction of a human being to his or her psychic states.[21] Such approaches seem to be rationally plausible, because the phenomena of the *human* being are susceptible to being explained through determinable (and determining) causal relations, firm repetitive patterns, and as such are rationally predictable and controllable. However, if these are presented as generally applicable and exhaustive, they necessarily ignore the deeper spiritual and existential realms of being, since the latter are not subject to any mechanistic relations. Spirituality is anything but mechanistic or automatic. The creative dynamics of spirituality have their own inner "principles"; their subtle qualities are essentially out of the reach of science. Many philosophers of the 20th Century were pointing to this problem (Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, among others).

Tarkovsky presents a person in his or her fullness and multi-dimensionality. The human person must be perceived as an irreducible whole in order to able to articulate his or her existential life concerns. Of course, the "spiritual" is not an extra "layer" of being, some added feature (for example, the "religious dimension"—despite our recourse to such expressions at times). It is *always* and *already here.* Being cannot be deprived of spirituality; it *is* spiritual, in the sense to which we have alluded above as de-limiting. Only our eyes are limited, not adjusted to see the real, the whole as spiritual. It depends upon *how* one "looks." We tend to narcotize our ability to perceive the spiritual. Hence we remain, somehow comfortably, trapped within the net of various sociological or psychological factors that we take to be "determinants," robbing ourselves of the spiritual freedom that is the essential component of our human dignity. To our own self-image, we reduce the sense of the earth,

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[21] Viktor E. Frankl, *Homo Patiens: Versuch einer Pathodizee* (Vienna: Deuticke, 1950).

life, and being itself, losing the most essential dynamic connectedness with them. We tend to deprive them of their inherent beauty, depth and essential goodness.

In stark contrast to some of the attitudes represented by various figures and roles in *Solaris* (and in *Stalker)*, Solaris (and the Zone) is *not* a problem to be solved; it expresses a mystery that is to be glimpsed and respected in humility. It is not so important to decide whether Solaris (or the Zone) refers to "external" or "internal" phenomena. In Tarkovsky, very correctly we think, there is not a strict demarcation between immanence and transcendence, between human consciousness and the ongoing conscious creation of the divine (as the Divine itself, incarnated in the process of creation).

On the contrary, the mystery of personal individuation and a unique personal life is mirrored by the incomprehensible substance of Solaris, as it is by the enigmatic space of the Zone. Being *is* mysterious, and one is already an integral part of it. Tarkovsky exposes the essential inseparability of the physical, psychological, and spiritual (moral, value-laden, religious) and suggests the profound *unity* of being. Of course, he also points to particular problems like the relation between science and ethics, and poses questions like "Should we have moral considerations in scientific research?," "Could science be morally 'neutral'?," "Do we have to limit ourselves in research in order to survive?," "Could science bring us any further in our self-knowledge?," "What are the nature and limits of our knowledge?" Such pragmatic considerations lie straightforwardly before us. However, we sense that Tarkovsky conveys a more essential critique that focuses not on the symptoms, but on the spiritual bearings of our de-spiritualized attitudes. "What good is it to go out into space if it's only to distance ourselves from the fundamental problem of man: the harmonizing of the spiritual and the material world."[22]

In *Solaris,* the question of the naturalization of consciousness and arbitrary reductions imposed on perceived phenomena are expressed with alarming seriousness and urgency. We see how the main characters are exposed to the incomprehensible efficacy of the Solaris

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[22] Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 173.

substance. Preceding Chris are the astrobiologist, Sartorius, the cyberneticist, Snaut, and the physiologist Gibaryan. Scientific explanations compete with spiritual perceptions of a deeper meaning of events. Are such subjective perceptions trustworthy? Are human emotions reliable indicators of the real? Is scientific rationality a proper way of approaching the truth about reality and the human person? During the "Solaris conference," when a young cosmonaut, Berton, witnesses events from the space ship, we can follow how his lived perceptions are dismissed by pre-given scientific frameworks and explanations.

The question of evidence is of central concern here. Is evidence only the evidence of spatio-temporal objects? Or in a more reductionist manner, is "real being" only what can be mathematizible, measured, and quantified?[23] Subjective testimony to a deeper meaning of what is concretely experienced (Berton) does not seem to have scientific worth for the scientific community. They have lost faith in their "solaristic" mission.[24] But Berton's "subjective" testimony is the message for humanity, even though everything that he describes gets interpreted in terms of some kind of psychical pathology, wrongly functioning brain processes, "bio-magnetic" influences, or lack empirical (objectivistic) verification. During the film we witness many formulations like "watch all of it with our own eyes," "Of course, you

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[23] See for example, Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, Il: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

[24] In a manner similar to the situation in *Stalker* with respect to the Zone, Tarkovsky responds to an interview question regarding the faith of the fellow travelers and our Stalker: "The Writer definitely denies its existence. He says, 'It probably doesn't exist at all,' and asks the Professor, 'Who told you that it exists?' The Scientist points to the Stalker. It's he who is the only witness to the existence of the Room, the only one who has faith. All information about it comes from him, so it's easy to imagine that he made it all up. For him, what's worse is not that they were afraid but that they didn't believe. That faith no longer has any place in the world." Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 57.

can see all this for yourselves," "But I saw it all, with my own eyes," "After all, I saw all this with my own eyes," as well as many invocations of "hearing," "listening," and commands to pay attention—reminding us of the phenomenological/philosophical maxim: "Back to experience," "Back to the things themselves."

For Tarkovsky, a genuine spirituality includes the *moral*. For receiving and "decoding" the Solaris messages, it is not enough to search among the laws of natural or cosmic elements, not even among the laws of consciousness or unconsciousness; it is not sufficient to explore the nature of memory and the psychological motivations of dreams. In *Solaris*, we are confronted with a soft but irresistible voice of *conscience* through moral emotions. Various psychological disorders develop on the spaceship as a consequence of "Solaris's radiation." Human minds, human hearts are exposed to a bright light.

We can appeal again to Frankl. As existential therapist, he observes that many of the very real psychological disorders have spiritual roots, and he speaks of "unconscious religiosity," which intrudes through our dreams and conscience into awareness. The psychosomatic is thus revelatory of the spiritual as the spiritual elucidates the psychosomatic. In *Solaris*, the "visitors" appearing to the crewmembers, torturing their bare minds, are not merely the substantialzations of their memories; they are living embodiments of their conscience, real incarnations of guilt and pain! Sartorius, an ideal type of the de-humanized scientist, finds a scientific way of "annihilating" the "visitors." But one cannot simply annihilate "visitors" through some scientific method—even though human beings have often reached out for that type of "relief" (from sedatives and narcotics to genocide). Toward the end of the film we see that there is only one way of healing a tormented human mind: forgiveness and loving.

In one scene, there is a long shot of Chris Kelvin's ear; he is listening to Solaris and hears a call that has no words.[25] It cannot be decoded by the best technological devices. It bears the spiritual, moral meaning, silently awaking his loving. Everything finds reconciliation when Chris becomes able to sacrifice everything for the sake of Hari (loving her without conditions and under any set of conditions). *Loving* is portrayed as the only way of personal redemption, the only way to restore personal existential wholeness. Specifically human emotions, moral emotions,[26] like shame or guilt, are not to be repressed, even if in the name of science: "Shame—the feeling that will save mankind!" Shame and guilt in this film, and other emotions like loving, reveal more truth about reality than rationality does. Without them, a human becomes less than "animal," namely, a mere rational beast.

In contrast to Sartorius, who issues this reprimand to Chris: "Don't' turn a science problem into a love story," Chris acknowledges a love we can experience but can never explain—recognizing further that loving is the only genuine or at least most profound access to other unique persons. Throughout his ongoing repentance and transformation, we can see the bottomless whirling mass of Solaris moving: loving is awakening. A viewer's insides tremble. Tarkovsky, once asked about Kelvin's "love story," reveals: "Maybe, indeed, Kelvin's mission on Solaris has only one aim: to show that love of the other is indispensable to all life. A man without love is no longer a man. The entire "solaristic" is meant to show that humanity must be love."[27]

The efforts to reduce mystery to the rank of a problem, to approach the subtle life of Solaris in a quantitative, objectivizing, violent manner, are obvious in the scientists'

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[25] It is perhaps noteworthy that "Kelvin" is an absolute temperature scale. William Thompson/Lord Kelvin defined "absolute" as the temperature at which there is no movement. Does this suggest that Kelvin has a relation to the absolute?

[26] See Anthony J. Steinbock, *Moral Emotions: Reclaiming the Evidnence of the Heart* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univerity Press, 2014).

[27] Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 167.

intentions to subject the Ocean's plasma to "heavy radiation." "It is the only way to make contact with this monster." An original report by Berton hoped to keep the research, "solaristic," alive. But humans tend to destroy what cannot be comprehended and controlled. (In *Stalker*, similarly, the scientist brought a bomb in order to destroy the Zone.) But Solaris seems to be resistant to such approaches, mirroring the loveless intentions of our minds back to us in form of "visitors." Tight interconnections between wakeful consciousness, its unconscious contents, and moral conscience become visible in the presence of Solaris.

Tarkovsky makes us see Solaris breathing with fog and moisture, swirling at the surface and impenetrable in its depth. The image of the ocean bears a strong biblical, mythical, mystical, and poetical charge. It speaks of a *mystery of creation* and *co-creation*. Not only life originates in the ocean; the "Divine" Solaris "lives," "moves," "thinks" and what it "thinks," *exist*s. But existence gets perverted without loving, deprived of its own essence of goodness. Solaris subtly reacts to such perversions. It seems that it transmits the signals toward reconciliation, which in fullness would mean restoration of the original *unity* and essential *interdependence* of all elements of the created and uncreated universe, including humans. It reveals the creative *individuating* power of loving and freedom. Hari, Chris' deceased wife, who committed suicide because she suffered from the lack of Chris's loving, is not only an embodiment of his guilt. She is not a mere unusual extra-terrestrial formation of particles; she is not a mere illusion created by Solaris through Chris's unpeaceful mind. She represents an exposition of the personalization and individuation of a human being through loving. Hari seems to parallel the process of becoming a human person, becoming individuated—like we all are. She is becoming still more real, still more independent (first she could not exist outside Chris's presence), still more human and uniquely herself – as Chris is getting to love her, to surrender himself and sacrifice for her. Hari is gaining reality through his *loving*; she is called back to existence! Within the process of Chris's own self-transformation, Hari ceases to be a mere burden of Chris' accumulated past; she becomes for him a *real loving presence*. With forgiveness and reconciliation, a strange form of creation,

co-creation or resurrection is taking place here (resurrections that Snaut, the cyberneticist, says he "can't get used to"!).

4. Stalkers, Vocations, and Disorientations

In what we might call the cinematographic "parables" of *Stalker* and *Solaris*, one notices the typological character of the main protagonists. In *Stalker*, this is all the more pronounced since we never hear the guide's or the followers' names. They simply address each other by what they do such as "Writer" and "Professor." Perhaps the name would be too intimate, too revealing and inter-personally binding, in the sense of a biblical "metaphysics of the name." Nevertheless, we can approach the characters of stalkers, artists, writers, scientists, professors, mothers, and lovers in Tarkovsky as living artistic embodiments of inner attitudes toward the mystery of one's own existence, vocation, and suffering. The pain of the characters is real for them, concrete, as are our own fears and pains, as is our own existential isolation in which we get trapped. However, in somewhat schematic, typological, and seriously grotesque manners as they are presented by Tarkovsky, we could recognize "model" detractors, pandering to social, ideological, and economic pressures, benumbing the vertical call inviting one to transcend toward the deeper sense of his or her identity, toward his or her *vocational self*. They can become detractors for others, but also self-detracting, self-distracting, and distracting for others. In *Stalker* we perhaps deal with more sophisticated, intellectual postures; nevertheless, there is a huge variety of masks in which we become disoriented before others and before ourselves as we carry out our eager life-struggle "to survive."

The Writer, in *Stalker*, is a very familiar and sympathetic character. Tarkovsky himself expresses his sympathies toward him. The Writer shows himself to be a cynic, skeptical, and disappointed; he is tired of life, an apathetic alcoholic who has lost his faith in God, in people, in meaning, and in his noble ideals (enlightenment, making people better).

This loss of self is expressed in his personal disavowal: "What kind of a writer am I if I hate writing!" Letting his own artistic sensibility conform to public opinions and demands, perhaps even to political or ideological systems (allusions no doubt to the gulags), he loses himself. He disdains his "vocation" as a writer, however authentic it might have been for him at the beginning. We hear him lament in despair: "I wanted to change the world and they changed me! To their own image!" he says in despair with face turned to the viewer.[28] He admits that just one person is interesting for him among humankind: himself. In his isolating pain and fear, he seems prideful and self-protective. We can see a paradoxical image created by Tarkovsky when the Writer places a crown of thorns on his head. "I will not forgive you"! The Writer is unhappy, not at peace, and empty. Everything is boring, devoid of inspiration and creativity—this is the reason, it seems, that he goes to the Zone. In a philosophical sense, the Writer may represent coarse relativism and skepticism.

The Professor/Scientist is an intellectual in another sense, dealing with "universal truths" given as natural laws and with strict rational correctness. In contrast to the Writer, at least, he seems to believe in something: in the ideal of science, in scientific explanation, and in the progress of empirical research. Later we find out that he comes into the Zone with the intention of accomplishing the following (self-appointed) mission: to destroy the heart of the Zone ostensibly to save humankind from its own destruction. Whereas the Writer comes into the Zone with a gun—a form of particular destruction—the Professor/Scientist comes into the Zone with a bomb—a form of universal destruction. The Zone remains outside of the control of human scientific rationality; so therefore—completely misunderstanding the nature of Zone's force and effects—the Professor/Scientist ostensibly fears the abuse of the Zone's putative power for the world-control and evil. Nevertheless, this "noble" motivation seems to

[28] It seems as if he speaks to the viewer, blaming people for corrupting art and artists with our entertainment, pandering to ideological and commercial demands, as Tarkovsky mentions in his reflections.

cover up his own disappointments and unhappiness, his search for fame (the Nobel Prize) and revenge (his colleague had an affair with his wife).

Both Writer and Professor/Scientist here represent attitudes of persons experiencing a direct confrontation with ethical or spiritual claims, while facing their own interior "monsters" born out of their personal pains, failures, and non-loving.

The exemplar and main protagonist is the Stalker. Tarkovsky adopts the Russian neologism, ста́лкер, from the English term, "stalker."[29] With connotations even more intense than "seeker," the term suggests someone who obsessively pursues something or someone, an activity that is undertaken with some vigilance, and is punishable by law. In fact, apparently, our "Stalker" had been caught previously (for stalking in the Zone) and spent five years in prison. He risks facing ten years this time if he is caught again, but still claims he "must" go to the Zone.

Moreover, it is not insignificant that our Stalker functions in the Zone very much like a spiritual *guide*, confirming our understanding that to be a stalker, one cannot have any self-interest; the stalker is in the service of others. What is more, our Stalker is prohibited from entering the room in the heart of the Zone where the deepest wishes of human heart are fulfilled. We might ask if this is due to a temptation of self-interest or because the Stalker does not need it—since he carries the Zone within himself anywhere he moves. In either case, the life of a stalker is a life of pure service to others, with no ulterior motives. Our Stalker, in fact, receives no appreciation for his exhausting service. Quite the contrary; he tends to experience ingratitude and misapprehension, like when he is accused of abusing others in Zone or of enjoying power over people in Zone. Further, our Stalker cannot know who he

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[29] According to Natasha Synessios, in 1973, Tarkovsky read the prominent Soviet science-fiction writers, Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's Roadside Picnic, published in 1972. They were the ones who originally coined the neologism, ста́лкер. See Andrei Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, trans., William Powell and Natasha Synessios (New York: Faber and Faber Limited, 1999), 375-79.

brings into the Zone, or what they will take from it. Nor can he be joyful when another suffers.

"What does the Zone mean?" Tarkovsky used to be asked this question in interviews, and obviously he was trying hard to be patient with such questions. For him it is not important if the Zone is ontically real (as a place). First of all, the Zone is a "space" of personal faith, a Stalker's *faith*, and hence the subjective (and intersubjective) realm of the deepest interior life of the human person. Yes, our Stalker is an "idealist," but his faith-creation of the Zone has much more ontological reality than the Writer's or Professor/Scientist's reality in which they live. Indeed, they are attracted by this faith, this mysterious elusive realm that is such a strong force for the believer. The Stalker immersed them right into this transformative spiritual space. "…what's important to the Stalker is to light a spark, a belief in the heart of people."[30]

The first meeting, the introductory shot of the Stalker, pictures him as a part of a "community." He lies in a marital bed, which is the most intimate space, together with his wife and child. A starting point here is an intimate loving community; transcending even these deep emotional bonds in order to follow a more profound "ought" given from beyond, he leaves to accomplish a "mission"—an image with Trinitarian implications.[31]

A stalker is said to be "God's fool," a prophet, a messianic character, an "eternal pushover." A stalker will seem to many to be naïve, since from a mundane perspective, he will fall for anything. But this diagnosis is outside of any faith perspective and from the

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[30] Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 57.

[31] There are two long shots in *Stalker* that present the "Trinitarian" constellation of people (the bed in the beginning, and the lasts scenes in the Zone with water running all over the three men. The resemblance of Rublev's Trinity constellation is no coincidence and the association is almost forced.

perspective of so-called objective reality and world-interests.[32] Tarkovsky's Stalker even has a patch on his head of a different color, as a distinctive sign of anointment and election perhaps, or perhaps a mark of purity or holiness (similarly, the main protagonists in *Solaris* and *Nostalghia* (1983) are also marked with a light colored patch). The Stalker is full of "fear and trembling," always aware of the seriousness of being a stalker, bearing a weighty responsibility, but without taking himself too seriously, since again, everything in the Zone is on the move, inspiring an attitude of humility, reverence, and even humor.

The Zone is always "active," even in his own house—elements are manifesting themselves in the room (one can hear the wind, see a lit fire, water is running, and the strange walls remind us of the earth ground). However, civilization is on the move, too, announced by the sounds of a train. In reality, the Stalker seems never to be outside of the Zone (like Chris was never outside of his "home"), even when, from a certain objective perspective, he was outside the Zone. The mysterious space is always with him, within him, ever-calling him to serve, even "enslaving" him.

Dramatic features of biblical prophets are reinforced when Tarkovsky made his Stalker read from The Book of Revelation (as if he himself had a vision) or when he is recounting to his companions the gospel story of the Emmaus disciples (where the *names* were not pronounced but omitted with eloquent silence – one can place one's own name in the silent space).[33] The hearts of his listeners are "burning." There are other places when the Stalker "preaches" or prays. At one point he has a beautiful speech on "weakness," "fragility"

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[32] There was another stalker, who was our Stalker's teacher. "Teacher" apparently lost his way in the sense that he became self-interested, and was thereafter nicknamed, "Porcupine." From Teacher to Porcupine—what a transformation! Porcupine has crushed the flowers in Zone and came to hate it. He sold out his brother in the "tube" (resulting in the brother's death) and he then committed suicide. ("Tube," like "grinder," are euphemisms for the "gulags.") There is a "Judas" theme here, but also the brother against brother theme as well.

[33] Is this why Tarkovsky scripted the persons without proper names?

and "freshness" of being. Humility, powerlessness, non-violence, and surrender are pronounced to be the greatest forces in the universe, full of genuine creative potential. We are reminded of the profundity of the ancient "Tao-Te-Ching" and are brought even beyond the Abrahamic spiritual context (as Tarkovsky wants to entertain in his *Sacrifice*, 1986) by introducing the deeper connections between Eastern and Western spirituality. That is, our Stalker speaks in the name of all genuine spiritual paths, independently of race, gender, religion, and culture. Profound spiritual wisdom of all great contemplative traditions is being conveyed by his speech and incarnated in his person.

The message of the Zone is incarnated in the Stalker, since the Zone is the realm of the person's deepest interior life. This is why one's own safety on the trip in the Zone is "dependent on the interior makeup of each individual, as the Stalker makes known in one of his speeches. If travelers come with sincere desires, they have nothing to fear. Otherwise, everything changes and the place becomes dangerous."[34] However, the divine realm of the Zone has a power to bring back the lost innocence of childhood, the simplicity of nature and purity of heart. Its transformative forces are humility and vulnerability, its ways are mercy, gentleness and loving (as manners of redemption and being redeemed). By contrast, stiffness of neck (pride) and callousness of heart represent the greatest dangers. The Zone cannot be gained by any external power as we are taught by images of ruined tanks in the Zone. Paradoxically, it is conquered by the "weakness" and "fragility" of an open human heart. The Stalker himself personifies this.

Being a stalker is a *calling*. Is it a calling or *the* calling that animates all callings. He, himself homeless, has his real *home* [the Zone] within himself, but realized by guiding others in the Zone. Being a Stalker is a *vocation* in the deepest sense of a word. He himself experiences the *call* in a direct unconcealed way, as fully vertical, and as fully transcendent and immanent at the same time. The same soft voice speaks to Stalker through the elements; through the wild innocence of nature (like around the father's house in *Solaris*) suggesting

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[34] Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 58.

original creation or biblical Eden, through the caressing hands of his loving wife, and through the hardships of his handicapped but gifted daughter. For Tarkovsky, this girl simply represents hope. She is a child of the Zone: Toward the end of the film we see her moving things with the sheer power of her mind, while the fervent love poem is recited as the background. And certainly, Stalker becomes the *call, the "bell"* for others.

In whatever profession, in whatever external form one participates in the process of co-creation, one is "first" or most profoundly *called to be a stalker*. Vocational efficacy goes from *inside out*, e.g. from being to doing, not the other way around, even though the being is realized through doing. Being a genuine artist, a poet, a teacher, a human-right activist, a worker, a pope, a scientist, a philosopher, a mother means most profoundly in and through them to be a stalker. *Being-a-stalker* is a different expression for the primordial call of and to Loving, and as such always has a deeper interpersonal meaning. The vocational *call* itself is an "absolute ought," imposing an "infinite task" (speaking with Husserl), which is witnessed by so many persons whose life meant a real contribution to co-creation, for sake of all humankind. Andrei Rublev, Chris Kelvin, Andrei Gorchakov in *Nostalghia*, and Alexander in *Sacrifice* are stalkers, the prophetic, messianic, and mystic figures, representing the faithful *listening* and following of the *call,* opening the Zone for others, revealing the mystery of one's true individuation, identity, and interpersonality. *The essential vocational task of the human being is to become a stalker* in an absolutely unique and profoundly personal way.

5. Radical Way of Self-Transcendence: Spiritual Transformation through Affliction

We may agree that creativity and loving bring meaningfulness and transcendence into the human person's life. But how could one affirm a meaning in suffering? How can any sane person ever accept meaning in the face of evil and pain? This must be the heaviest question posed by Tarkovsky's films as well—a question of theodicy or better, "anthropodicy." In this

last section, we would like to address the problem of meaning when facing irreconcilable confrontations, pain, and evil.[35]

In the concentration camp, writes Frankl, suffering changed most people into animals with a single goal, namely, to stay alive.[36] Only the "best," he recalls, did not succumb to such terrible existential pressures and stayed "human," keeping their values of personhood alive. However, these individuals were the first ones to die. In spite of this, we know that Frankl held on to the necessity of *sustaining meaning*, even in the midst of evil situations. He formulates the piercing question, which, we think is crucial for our issue: How is it that the same conditions of extreme suffering can bestialize one person, and at the same time, awaken heroic courage, unconditioned love, martyrdom, or holiness in another? There must be an essential possibility allowing us to penetrate through suffering toward the depths of a spiritual life. Mystics have known this possibility for ages, typified in the Christian tradition of the "dark night" of John of the Cross.

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[35] Even though the films of Andrei Tarkovsky are very realistic in expressing the nature of the human person and the world, they do not leave us with despair. Quite the contrary, they invoke hope since for him to hope is human. "Humans are born with hope. One doesn't lose hope when faced with reality because hope is not rational. It is defended against any logic. … horror, just like beauty, inspires a believer with hope." Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 172.

[36] One would not think that suffering or affliction would have anything to do with transcendence. Similar to Tarkovsky, Frankl very nicely suggests three possible ways of transcendence and ways of actualizing meaning: 1) creative activity, work or a task; 2) fulfilling kinds of experience, like deep loving relationships; and 3) transmuting suffering (its evil, passivity and resistance) into a highest spiritual activity or achievement. Viktor E. Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben. Psychotherapie für heute* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2006).

Andrei Rublev in Tarkovsky's portrayal is a sensitive "idealist," subtly perceiving beauty and goodness, hoping to bring them to others through his art. How can such a gentle spirit endure the confrontations with violence, brutality, degradation, and de-creation in its most extremes forms? How can a religious dreamer (like Stalker) and a creative genius bear the reverse side of life without becoming broken, hardened, embittered, or insane? How can he not lose his innocence and trust in God and humanity, without going "mad"? If violence and brutality become the norm, then the mad must become "hyper-normal." In *Nostalghia*, for example, Dominico (who has become mad at the sickness of the world and whom the protagonist, Andrei, takes as his spiritual guide) exclaims to passers-by before igniting himself—becoming himself the candle/flame: "We must go back to the main foundations of life without dirtying the water. What kind of a world is this if a madman tells you that you must be ashamed of yourselves!"

Tarkovsky's films try to articulate these questions at a background of the Christian motives of incarnation, self-sacrifice, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. These all find their unique shapes in an individual human life. Andrei Rublev as an artist and a fully devoted monk faces the greatest vocational task of his life: to remain hopeful and creative in the face of radical evil. He undergoes his "dark night," witnessing meaninglessness in the worst cruelties and destruction. Until the Tatar Raid, Andrei is pure and clean like a child, like a blank paper ready to serve a "divine writer." Tarkovsky parallels the real temple and Andrei as a "temple," and so creates a powerful image of his inner development. The walls shine with "whiteness" before being painted. He holds a little girl, rejoices and recites St. Paul's "Hymn of Love." The first real blow comes when he hears about the cruel blinding of the fellow artists in the forest. We see him in pain, besmirching the bright white wall with mud. The insanity of the cruelty is highlighted with the appearance of a simple-minded girl. Later we see the temple walls, already painted, all ruined and devastated—as well as Andrei standing in the ruins after the Tatar's raid. Again, in the words of *Nostalghia's* Dominico: "It

is the so-called healthy who have brought the world to the verge of ruin… We must go back to where we were to the point where you took the wrong turn."

Andrei first believes in and searches only for the good in the human being. He seems to be tolerant of one's failures and weaknesses. He believes that the poor condition of the Russian people can be changed by education and spiritual cultivation: "We must remind people more often that they are people." His art, his vocation also serves this purpose, for the honor and glory of God. One must keep striving for humanity, for goodness: "If you see only evil, you will never be blessed in God's eyes"—he says in his forest dialogue to Theophanes the Greek.[37] In the same dialogue, they speak about the suffering of the Russian people. We witness a folk performance of "Christ's" crucifixion. In spite of people's ignorance and sins, he says, one is encouraged by a simple glimpse of goodness in the eyes of a neighbor, and suddenly everything is lighter, as "after communion." For him, it seems, the words "hell" or "sin" can serve as religious educational formulae, but he does not really seem to believe in their reality. In another scene, in a beautiful natural setting, in an open field full of sunlight, we see him in dialogue with his brother monk and painter Danil. He explains to him his reasons why he refuses to paint "The Last Judgment." Why spread more fear among people?

However, Andrei soon himself experiences "The Last Judgment" during the Tatar's raid: "The Last Judgment" created by human beings alone, a perversion, a de-creation. We can see the dark smoke, burning fire, fusible lead – all what Danil advised him to use for the portrayal of The Last Judgment. The sacred place of the temple, with all its beautiful frescos and icons, is burned out, full of massacred human bodies. People *are* evil, capable of every evil deed. There is no hope. Only silence. Everything is silent. God is silent. It is the empty, absurd silence, the silence of a grave, the silence of Sheol.

Our monk, Andrei, himself killed a man as he was trying to protect the mute girl. There are only two survivors, both mute: the girl and himself. From now on, he has nothing more to say to people. He will not speak; he will no longer paint. What for? For whom? The

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[37] Theophanes the Greek [c. 1340 CE– c. 1410 CE] Byzantine artist and icon painter.

horror and pain are beyond words. In a short vision of the dead Theophanes, Andrei affirms that he was wrong when he believed in the human being's essential goodness. Andrei undergoes a profound *crisis of his own vocation and identity*. What is the meaning of his oath of silence? Is it atonement? Pain? Rebellion? Refusal? Loss of faith? Searching for answers in a silent dialogue with God? Monks used to take an oath of silence as means of repentance. Silence may as well signify his personal rebellion as his devoted waiting for an explanation, light, and new hope. We think that all of these are present in Andrei's silence. It becomes the silence of solitude more than of isolation. He silently comes back to the monastery and takes care of the mute girl. It seems that he refuses his vocation, his gift of creating and co-creating beauty.

After years of silence, the resurrection comes. We may wonder why it comes through Boriska's eager will to survive. But this will *to live* is associated with the boy's audacity, tenacity, and eagerness *to create* without clear foreknowledge of how it is to be done. Andrei seems taken with this movement of creation. Again we recall the fashioning of the mold for the bell with just the right clay, and the viewer cannot help but associate this with the God's creation of the "first" human persons. With the sound of the bell, Andrei is being "awakened" from his "death." But he is not the same; he became transformed, deepened through pain, loving, silence, reconciliation, and acceptance. He reaffirms life and creativity. It is not a coincidence that Tarkovsky alludes to the sequence of *life*, *death* and resurrection (*new life*) throughout the film. It is the most ancient religious image expressive of and inspired by the principle of rebirth in natural life. Penetrating pain with loving, he reached the deeper level of freedom. Of course, the movement of spiritual transformation is never fully accomplished for human persons. It is an ongoing process.

We assume that the key term for any spiritual rebirth may be *surrender*. Loving surrender is not to be understood as resignation. Surrender implies a deep hope and trust in essential goodness of reality even within an evil situation. All the great contemplative traditions speak of a peaceful bearing of existential contradictions. The human being is a

contradiction and lives in a contradictory world: human – divine, verticality – horizontality, spirit – materiality, loving – perversion of loving, intense human emotions – peace searching contemplation. Even human loving, which for God is essentially infinite, is restricted by finite conditions of creation. The ghost of Theophanes the Greek gave Andrei a strange kind of advice: "Live between forgiveness and remorse." What difficult advice! It is as if he were saying to him: "Live on the edge of the knife! For a human being, both are adequate, both are true, forgiveness *and* remorse. Do not escape the tension of this contradiction too easily; bear its existential burden and it will transform you. You will find peace in embracing the contradictory reality with loving heart, in a sheer loving way, as God does, in His image…" Such a God, however, is *essentially entangled* with creation, fully as it is – as contradictory: hence, the meaning of *incarnation*.[38] However, it is the hardest life-task.

For a human person, nothing can be more destructive than a direct confrontation with non-loving and de-creation. There are two negative ways of escaping the burden of contradictions: 1) one can renounce life in the name of some isolated detachment (many eastern teachings are commonly misinterpreted in this way) or 2) one can waste all his or her energy by directly fleeing life's conditions or events that go at their own pace, always bringing along some kind of violence. Neither of these ways can be the way for the mystic, true contemplatives, and all the genuine "stalkers." Andrei's "temptation" would be closer to the former case, Boriska's to the latter; here Andrei and Boriska are somehow complementary.

But Boriska is not just an analog of Andrei; he (the young novice) is the "call" of God for Andrei (the seasoned master); he is the personal "bell" himself, the appeal to and the "call" of his vocational self, the voice of the lost and "resurrected" meaning of creativity and service. However, Boriska's sincere and ferocious fight for life, which is imbued with the

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[38] Teilhard de Chardin understood the created world as an "extended incarnation," for example, Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, trans. By Gerald Vann, O. P. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961).

spiritual struggle of the creative process, the expressive activity of forging the bell, moved Andrei most deeply. He understood that they need each other; in the end, Andrei suggested that they should go together to serve others with their creativity: one will paint, the other one will make bells. Andrei affirms co-creation, getting back to service, back to personal creative engagement in the world, back to the contradictory guise of life in a loving and trustful way.

Tarkovsky's films point precisely to the mystery of suffering and human freedom in which affliction is transmuted by loving into new life, the "consecrated" life of an elected one, which is *essentially* accessible to any human being. And as with Andrei Rublev, new dimensions of depth and creativity may arise from here—dimensions of depth and creativity in which we are profoundly united with the relational Divine Life.

The same kind of ongoing spiritual transformation is going on in *Stalker* (the "afflicted servant," the journey in the Zone as a transformative space for the Writer and the Professor/Scientist), as well as with Chris Kelvin in *Solaris*. The spiritual journey in the Zone and at Solaris gradually uncovers the most intimate movements and hidden motivations of persons. It exposes human hearts to the light of their own awareness—something difficult to bear. Is it impossible to "see God's face and live," to be fully *present* in the divine *presence*?[39] Being exposed to Solaris can remain simply an experience of hell and lead to despair and suicide (Gibaryan). But it can also become a *transformative space*, a holy place

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[39] Our Stalker says that this is no place for a leisurely stroll, and sometimes what seems to be the longer way is the best way, even if another way seems more direct. We are reminded here of the four people who wanted to enter paradise: Rabbi Ben Azai, who so longed for God, immediately looked and died in his prime; Ben Abuyah, who remained intellectually confused, saw two gods instead of the One God, and became an apostate; Ben Zoma, who had not reconciled ordinary life with his mystical experiences gazed and went insane; only Rabbi Akiba, who was perfectly balanced in the order of his heart and mind, entered pardeis, left the garden an enlightened saint, and later died a martyr at the hands of the Romans at the age of 90. Cf. Talmud, Chagigah, 14b.]

with the burning bush calling one by *name*, inter-Peronsally, inviting him or her to transcend toward the deepest desires and genuine vocations. Chris Kelvin entered an unexplored existential space full of deep human emotions. Regarding this mission, Tarkovsky said: "Kris in *Solaris*, placed into un-human conditions, preserves his humanity. Because the people on this space station have only to solve one problem: how to remain human."[40]

Chris allowed himself to be exposed as vulnerable in loving, accepting the unacceptable conditions for love's sake (Hari). The appeal to remain human, most profoundly *calling to love* and *be-loved*, brought him into a liminal transformative process, which was outwardly manifested as sickness, high fever, psychological unease, anxiety. We do not exactly know the reasons for his psychophysical breakdown; we can only guess that emotional struggles were too overwhelming, and the intensity of Solaris, too high. The scene is even suggestive of initiative shamanic periods after which an individual gains new, deeper, and broader consciousness. We witness a kind death and re-birth, crucifixion and resurrection of Chris.

During his illness, Chris has hallucinations or dreams. We are shown the shots of balloons again. In the midst of his agonies, he "meets" with his mother. First, as an Eve from paradise, she is eating an apple. Later, as a divine mother, she cleans him with water, with profound tenderness and care. He is consoled and purified: mother, the first and most significant human person to be loved by and to love. Perhaps it is "Solaris," engaging his mind, taking on the form of his mother to teach him, bring him comfort, and a sense of safety and home. For Chris, mercy and goodness have a feminine face (Hari, mother; notice, too, Stalker's wife and daughter); he is *already beloved*. And if his agony is a kind of repentance, than mercy is already and ever-present, and does not come as an exchange for his atonement.

Let us recall the story of the prodigal son as it is portrayed by Rembrandt. The famous shot of Chris coming home and meeting with his father is a strong, deeply affecting cinematic experience made in honor of Rembrandt's masterpiece. But in Rembrandt's picture, there is

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[40] Tarkovsky, *Interviews*, 42.

not only a welcoming father alone (evoking "masculinity" or the "fatherhood" of God): one hand, which is laid upon the son's shoulder, is obviously feminine! It is a hand of a woman, of the mother as a loving principle, God as a loving mother. A medieval English mystic, Julian of Norwich, must have been surprised not only by Divine "motherhood," but even more by a revelation to her that God cannot forgive a sinner. However, this was not because God would feel offended, or because God is too zealous for justice, but simply because, "there is no wrath in God," nor "blame" nor "anger," only endless Love and Goodness. Divine Loving cannot forgive a sin, i.e. a detraction, a disorientation – simply because Sheer Loving cannot be insulted or angry; therefore, forgiveness becomes the process of humans relating to God, a part of a transformational home-coming (like in Chris's case), restoring the *connection* with one's own deepest essence, which is, at the same time, the Source of being.[41] These are rather revolutionary insights also present in Tarkovsky's films. One must forgive oneself for losing oneself, for leaving one's own loving essence, for not becoming who one *is* in a vocational sense. Actually, Chris was never away from home.

Conclusion

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[41] "Reading One Hundred Two, Chapter 49: To the soul this was a mighty wonder (which was continually shown in all showings, and with great diligence observed) that our Lord God, as far as He is concerned, cannot forgive–because He cannot be angry–it would be impossible. For this was shown: that our life is all based and rooted in love, and without love we cannot live. And therefore to the soul (which by His special grace sees so obviously the exalted, marvelous goodness of God, and that we are endlessly owed to Him in love) it is the most impossible thing that can be that God would be angry, for wrath and friendship are two opposites." Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Father John-Julian (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2011), 115.

We suggested how Tarkovsky artistically expressed central aspects of the vocational experience of the human person, aspects that play an essential role in the constitution of the individual's unique personal identity, namely the interrelated phenomena: the call to transcend and self-transcendence in loving, spirituality, and creativity as a liberating transcending act undertaken out of the spiritual wholeness of true personal integrity. We saw that each form of creativity is already a vertical movement, and always going beyond the individual egoic, self-imposed restrictions, his or her psychosomatic and socio-historical conditionings. It also means that every truly other-than-myself directedness is already a basic human mode of transcendence.

This same phenomenon can be expressed from two perspectives: From one perspective, transcendence is the genuine *telos* of creativity, and as such always already vertical; from another, each genuine vertical movement of (self) transcendence is creative. All the various *specific forms* of vocational experience always bear the quality of unique personal transcending and creative movement. Such creativity is not a repetition of the same meanings, but always brings a new quality and thus means a new (i.e. real) creation, or better co-creation; its forms, of course, can be various, from artistic deeds to creative upheavals in one's own life as it is confronted with otherness, transformational forces, and suffering.

Moreover, the meaning of creativity and transcendence, revealed in and through individual vocational experience, is always tightly bound with *others*, with service and care for them, with the creation of loving relationships. Co-creation then necessarily means not only the co-activity with the divine creative loving flow, but also a loving co-activity among individuals of the human community, or even broader, co-creation through vocational experience implies a directedness toward harmonizing with all created beings.

Thus, the significance of all these inherent interrelations revealed essential points concerning the meaning of an individual vocation as co-creation. There is a real paradox about the basic human existential situation: True vocational self-realization of an individual can take place through his or her creative self-transcendence toward the meaning or value that

contributes to a greater good, more expansive than that of the isolated individual. Implicitly, this also shows that it is not mere social involvement or actions that contribute to a real communal enhancement, since many "artists," "social activists," "religious teachers," "workers," etc., can become rather vocational disorientations and detractors. This is because *vocation* in the deepest sense is not merely about the *what* of *doing*, but about the *how* of *being* in which one uniquely becomes who one most deeply *is – through what* one *does*. This *how* of *being* is *loving* as always and already deeply intertwined with the very Source of Loving. *Being-a-stalker*, we saw, must remain at the core of vocational experience, animating every vocation. The essential vocation of each human being is to become a stalker and as such to participate with a co-creation in an absolutely unique, profoundly personal way through his or her deeds and service.

While coming to terms with the experience of vocation, creativity, and transcendence, we are confronted also with the question of reductionism, as Tarkovsky tries to articulate explicitly in *Solaris* as well as in *Stalker*. These most essential human phenomena (namely, vocation, creativity, transcendence) are impossible to approach when a human being is reduced to its psychosomatic or socio-historical determinants. The spiritual dimension is *always* and *already irreducibly here.* Tarkovsky highlights the fact that the essential inseparability of the physical, psychological, and spiritual points to a *unity* of all created (and uncreated) being. His protagonists witness the only way of restoring such wholeness: through openness and loving as the way of redeeming an individual, community, and the world. Loving is at the same time the only genuine means of and condition for personal individuation.

After all, the whole of creation is constantly moving, and paradoxically finds its peculiar individuation in this creative flow. The spiritual dimension, which bursts forth as a dynamic source of freedom and creativity, keeps deepening and growing in unity with all created being and its mysterious creative Source. As we are taught by the mystical and contemplative traditions, real leaps in such a spiritual growth can also occur (and most

radically) through the experience of *affliction* and subsequent personal *transformation*. This happens most concretely in and through loving which permeates pain (loving the other, loving surrender as loving acceptance to what is as it is; this has transformative potential). Vocational experience is then also an ongoing, unceasing spiritual transformation.

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